Redefining Public Service Broadcasting: Enlightenment, Entertainment and Participation

Introduction

Every decade seems to demand a re-orientation of public service broadcasting (PBS) in order for the institutions to survive technological, societal and market changes. In the 1980s and 1990s, the European PBS institutions responded to the increased channel competition by rearranging their schedules. Even though the responses to these challenges differed in the various PSB channels across Europe their strategies have some similar key features; a central strategy was to compete for large audiences in prime time, and to provide more airing time for entertainment (Svvertsen 1997). Through these strategic responses, the public service broadcasters managed to maintain a central position in European broadcasting; the PSB channels are market leaders in many countries and continue to play a prominent role in broadcast regulation both on EU and national level. The increased amount of entertainment programming was nevertheless criticized for creating a misbalance in the so-called ‘Reithian trinity’ of information, education and entertainment. The focus on audience appeal was seen as a threat to the legitimacy of PSB as an alternative to the commercial channels (Levy 1999). Echoing this crisis discourse, current research literature on PBS tends to focus on how the digital age imposes a new and severe decline for PBS (Steemers 1997; Born 2003; Picard 2005; Hoynes 2003). Several studies have pointed to how digitalisation and convergence undermines the original
rational for public service broadcasting, and thus questions the future of the PSB model. However, these studies seem to overlook the current redefinition of public service broadcasting, in which audience participation plays a central role. In this article, I will investigate in what ways participation represents a key strategy in the PSB’s response to the challenges in the digital age: How do public broadcasters combine traditional entertainment formats with new forms of audience participation? How does the PBS channels incorporate the possibilities for audience participation offered by new technology? The article aims to shed light on current societal debates on the importance of PSB, and on the normative discussion on the role of PSB in post-modern societies.

**Literature Review**

In media studies, the notion audience participation has many meanings and connotations, but for the purpose of this study I will limit the discussion to three strands of research. First, audience participation has been understood as a tool for empowerment of the people and analyzed in light of the ideal of participatory democracy. In this research tradition, access to the media is regarded as a way to educate ordinary people to partake in the public debate (Pateman 1970; Brecht 1974). A variety of critics have suggested that the mass media do not adequately prepare citizens for political participation (Entman 1989; Kellner 1990; Blakely 1971). According to Hoynes (1994), one of the early proponents of public television was to envision a different relationship between the institution and the viewers. Later research have pinpointed how these visions for public access television only in a limited degree have realized (Wenner 1975; Prehn 1992).

A second body of research has focused on audience participation as an institutional strategy. Media institutions implement feedback opportunities because the executives know it will attract more, and more loyal audiences. A survey among decision-makers in Norwegian media companies found that building brand loyalty was the main reasons for inviting the audience to participate. Enli (2005) and Syvertsen (2006) have illuminated how audience participation represents a new
source of revenue for broadcasters; the financial potential in “turning audiences into customers” is a prominent motivation for encouraging audience activity. Moreover, audience participation has been one of the major drivers in the development of new and innovative media formats. The possibilities for audience participation offered by new technology have resulted in multi-platform formats such as *Pop Idol* and *Big Brother* (Jones 2003; Columbo 2004; Syvertsen 2005).

The two above perspectives are combined in a research strand that has investigated audience participation in the context of public service broadcasting. McNair et al. (2003) have illuminated how there was an antipathy towards public involvement in PSB until the 1960s. This one-way relationship between the British BBC and its audience was due to class and professional biases among the staff, including the BBC’s first Director-General John Reith (McNair et al. 2003:20). Similar reluctance towards participation has been identified in research on Norwegian and Swedish public service broadcasting (Dahl and Bastiansen 1999; Ornebring: 2003).

To the degree that PSB channels encouraged audience participation it was in political debates and competitions with focus on academic forms of knowledge. The BBC-programme *Questiontime* exemplify how the public is invited to confront politicians as members of panels and as studio audiences. Moreover, the game show format *The 64,000$ Question* is an example of how educational aims included even Saturday night entertainment. During the 1950s and the 1960s, European PSB channels, including the British BBC, the Swedish SVT and the Norwegian NRK adapted the US format. In a study of the adaptation process in the NRK, Theisen (1993) found that the producers rhetorically underscored the educative aspects in order to justify the entertainment format. Likewise, recent studies illustrate how reality TV is included in PSB schedules, but that they avoid the most controversial formats. Instead the PSB channels tend to apply an additional value or a “PSB touch” to the formats. Syvertsen (2005) has shown how the Norwegian PSB channel NRK enlarged the age scale in reality programs by transmitting a docuseries with elderly participants. The majority of commercial reality programs invite young people to participate, and the PSB

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1 Although PSB channels as a rule have avoided the most controversial formats such as *Big Brother*, there are exceptions to the rule; the Swedish public service broadcaster SVT’s transmission of several seasons of the reality-TV format *Survivor*. This production was however criticized for being exploitive of the participants, and resulted in a public discussion about the ethics and values of PSB.
format thus countered this exclusion of elderly people.\footnote{Furthermore, the PSB institutions’ services include platforms such as the Internet and the mobile phone. This digital expansion have been criticised for commercialization and of hindrance to free market competition. However, there are nuances that separated the PSB institutions from the commercial companies; in a comparative study of four British TV channels’ websites, Siapera (2004) found that PSB institution BBC offered most educational possibilities.}

The public broadcasters’ ambivalence towards audience participation might be related to the general scepticism towards entertainment. In the debate about the PSB remit, it has been argued that entertainment is catered for by the commercial channels: the key function for the public channels should be to provide programming disdained by private channels. Bruun (2005) have illustrated how the entertainment is a core success factor for European public service broadcasting, and argues that entertainment should be central in the PSB remit. Supporting this view, Van Zoonen (2004) argues that it is about time to incorporate the popular as a part of the public mission. The inclusiveness of popular programming might provide the collective experiences and social belonging in which several scholars has argued to be the main rational for PSB (Graham and Davies 1997; Harrison and Woods 2001). More so than specific content, Scannell (2005) claims that PBS is primarily a communicative relationship between broadcasting and a new kind of general public. My aim in this article is to investigate this communicative relationship in light of the new possibilities for audience participation offered by new technology.

Design and Methods

This article contributes to the body of literature on audience participation by analyzing participation as a key response to the challenges of public service broadcasting in the digital age. I have chosen a comparative perspective in order to reflect that the concept of public service broadcasting includes a range of institutions of different sizes, and with different privileges and obligations. Comparative analysis is one of the basic methods in social sciences, and is regarded as a strategy for conducting post hoc research that seeks to control potentially confounding variables through careful case selection and matching. Among the major weaknesses of the method are limitations of generalizability of research results, and the difficulty of
finding comparable cases (Frendreis 1983; Lijphart 1971). The main aim of this article is not make generalized conclusions, but rather to gain understanding of the individual cases and from that draw some general assumptions.

The selection of cases for this study is based on Achille and Miege’s (1994) analysis of how European public service broadcasters has adjusted to external challenges. The analysis identified four different strategies to challenges of deregulation, digitalization and convergence. Corresponding with the typology, I selected four PSB institutions that have used different strategies in the face of current challenges: (1) The Norwegian NRK is chosen to represent the identification strategy, whereby a confrontation with the private competition is pursued directly in those areas where the private chains excel. In addition, there are also pragmatic reasons for selecting the NRK, and thus be able to benefit from my language skills and access to additional empirical data. (2) The British BBC corresponds with what Achille and Miege (1994:34) define as the strategy of opposition; where the public broadcaster partly adopts the private model of scheduling, while at the same time pursuing its own goals. This selection was also based on the fact that the BBC is regarded as the model of PSB worldwide. (3) The Swedish SVT is among the institutions that have picked up the traditions from the BBC, and remains a core bastion for public broadcasting. The SVT is an example of a PBS where one of the channels moves in the direction of increased commercialization while the other adopts a strategy of differentiation. Achille and Miege (1994) have classified this strategy as partial confrontation. (4) The USA’s PBS represents consolidation, where the strategy is to maintain the strength of existing public broadcasting and not oppose the private broadcasters. Moreover, the PBS is selected as an outline case, which highlights the other three because of the evident institutional differences.

Western Europe is labeled “the heartland of traditional public service broadcasting” (Raboy 1995), while the US public broadcaster is characterized as “a ghetto at the margins of the markets” (Harrison and Woods 2001). In the debate about the future of PSB, the US model of providing programming that is disdained by the commercial

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3 Even though the NRK does not represent the kind of complete popularization and interchangeability with commercial broadcasting such as the Italian RAI. The selection of the NRK is rooted in an aim to analyze former monopolies that are still publicly funded, and the fact that NRKs approach to new technological possibilities for participation is more commercial than in similar PBS institutions.
channels has been presented as an alternative to the European large-scale model (Avery 2005: Born 2003). These suggestions make it particularly relevant to contrast the “the heartland” of former monopolies and license feed European institutions with the market failure model of US public television.

The article draws on analysis of institutional documents from British BBC, Swedish SVT, Norwegian NRK and American PBS. The documents range from official policy documents and mission statements to press releases and homepages. In addition, the article draws on additional material from the NRK, including the Norwegian version of the format Test the Nation. I examined three aspects of audience participation in a new PSB environment: The institutional strategies for audience participation, the rhetoric used to legitimate participation as a PSB value and the implementation of strategy in programming.

**Participation as legitimacy**

The public broadcasters under scrutiny in the article - the British BBC, the Swedish SVT, the Norwegian NRK and the US PBS - all emphasized participation in their institutional documents. There were nevertheless significant differences in what the PBS institutions defined as participation and what forms of audience activities that were emphasized.

In line with the British BBC’s position as the principal PSB in Europe, the company is taking a leading role in the development of strategies for public broadcasting in the digital era. The policy document ‘Building Public Value” (2004) is not only written as an institutional document for the BBC, but also as an argument for the European public service model. The overall argument in the document is that the BBC aims to encourage active participation rather than passive viewing. This aim is in a high degree related to how digital technology enables “a true creative dialogue in which the public are not passive audiences but active, inspired participants” (BBC 2004:4).

The Norwegian public service broadcaster NRK’s policy document underlines the importance of audience participation, and aim to launch minimum 15 new formats a
year with interactivity as an important aspect (NRK 2004:18-19). The Swedish public broadcaster SVT proclaims that they will invite the audience to partake on different levels in the institution’s activities: “The SVT aims to develop dialogue by initiating conversations with the audience, not only through the TV-screen” (SVT 2004:3). In the US public channel PSB, audience participation is one of the three key principles: “Building trust, developing opportunities to connect, and providing opportunities for audience participation (www.pbs.org).

The “new” PSB

In the document, the overall argument is that the BBC intends to include the public on all levels in the institutional structure. The BBC’s basis for this argument is to admit having neglected the audience in the past: “Historically, the BBC has been a relatively closed organisation. It has guarded its independence fiercely and has tended to try to do most things itself (BBC 2004:98). From this point of departure, the BBC aims to establish a new identity as an inclusive and responsive institution: “The BBC aims to signalize that the institution is in a process of renewal – explicit expressed through the term New BBC – in which “the audience is in the front-seat” (BBC 2004:14). The key rationale for the BBC to redefine its role by encouraging audience participation seems to be digitalisation in itself: “The digital world demands a more open, responsive BBC” (BBC 2004:4-5). This argument gives associations to the idea of technological determinism, because the broadcaster claims that the new digital media environment has made it impossible to ignore the audience.

The audiences are regarded as the true owners of the institutions, and thus should be entitled to influence on the PSB programming. Thus, the audience is encouraged to give the public broadcasters feedback on how they are solving their PSB mission, for example through calls, letters and e-mails. The British BBC claims that they aim to improve the responsiveness and helpfulness of BBC Information, and raise customer satisfaction (BBC 2004:19). Moreover, the BBC claims that they will incorporate the response both at an institutional and a production level, in order for the audience to “believe that they can genuinely contribute to an influence their BBC” (BBC: 2004:104).
The Swedish public service broadcaster SVT is in a lesser degree admitting to having contributed to the so-called PSB paternalism. The SVT still acknowledge the need for renewal, and particularly for an increased dialogue with the public. In a speech at the annual shareholder meeting 2006, Director General Christina Jutterström, claimed that SVT had “initiated a public dialogue to nourish and strengthen our contacts with the public”. Jutterström illuminates this point by referring to the appointing of a viewer ombudsman: “In November, one of SVT’s best known programme hosts, Claes Elfsberg, was appointed the first viewer ombudsman with the remit to talk to and represent audiences”. The Director General claimed that the SVT had launched a project called “Expedition SVT” in an attempt to meet the viewers: “a panel manned by programme staff and management representatives, on a tour of indoor and outdoor shopping centres in eight different towns from Piteå to Malmö to discuss the programmes of today and tomorrow with passers-by” (Jutterström, 2006). The Swedish public broadcaster SVT has launched a website called “Free Television” in order to signalize to the public that the PSB institution differs from commercial media companies: “SVT belongs to everybody in this nation. From a democratic perspective, it is important to have free and independent television. We can be trusted, whatever happens. We are here for you. Whoever you are” (www.svt.se).

**Participation as expansion**

The redefinition of public service broadcasting is not limited to viewer feedback and audience satisfaction. In the new broadcasting situation, the PSB channels encounter competition not only from broadcast institution but also from digital media. In this situation, strategies for continued existence might include strategies for expansion. For the public broadcasters, innovation is closely related to the aim to expand and maintain a leading position within their respective markets; The BBC aims to be the world’s most important content provider, the SVT aspire to be Scandinavia’s leading broadcaster, while the NRK intend to be Norway’s leading media company (BBC 2004; SVT 2004; NRK 2002). The institutional self-image as an innovative spearhead in the media landscape is also found in the US public television channel PBS:

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4 Speech given by Mrs Christina Jutterström CEO, Sveriges Television (SVT), at the annual shareholder meeting April 4
Public television has always been a leader in new technologies, so it is no surprise that we are interested in content that adds value across all distribution platforms and that takes full advantage of all current and emerging opportunities for technological innovation. We have embraced integrated programming as we prepare for our digital future (www.pbs.org).

Likewise, the studied European broadcasters seem to have a self-image as innovative spearheads that should be present on all relevant platforms. The British BBC aims to maintain a dominant position by expanding their activities through including new platforms:

Using the Internet, mobile technology, broadband and interactivity, the BBC will be a pioneer and innovator combining new and old media to offer a range of new services that can make a difference to peoples lives (BBC 2004:55).

The Swedish SVT refers to how new user patterns are evolving, and how young people in particular seek other platforms than TV for information and entertainment (SVT 2003). The public broadcasters see themselves as institutions that should not be limited to television and radio, but develop their relations to the audience through interactive services and digital platforms. This illuminates how PSB channels regard their position as vulnerable due to competition from new media, but also recognises the possibilities offered by digitalization and convergence to redefine PSB and counter this competition.

Illustration: Test the Nation

The format Test the Nation is an illustrative example of how the possibilities for audience participation offered by new technology serves a function in redefining public service broadcasting. The argument here is not that participation is exclusively a PSB value, but that feedback opportunities might legitimate public service broadcasting. Test the Nation is a fruitful case because it contextualizes the way a commercial format is adapted in the realm of PSB: The format Test the Nation had its debut at the Dutch channel BNN in 2002 and has since then been launched in more
than 25 countries, including the four countries selected for this study. A difference was that while the format was produced for public service broadcasters in Britain, Sweden and Norway, it was produces by the commercial channel Fox in the USA. The differentiated international success of Test the Nation illustrates that a ‘typical’ PSB format might also be an ideal commercial format.

The Dutch format holder ‘Eyeworks’, present Test the Nation as ‘a three hours interactive event television’, based on feedback from the studio audience and the home audience. The format is designed as a national IQ test consisting of 70 multiple-choice questions, presented to the audiences on the TV-screen as well as the Internet: “In Test the Nation: The national IQ Test you’ll find out the truth about your intelligence, and give you a personal IQ score at the end of the program” (www.eyeworks.tv, 20.02.06).

Enlightenment

In their presentations of the format, the public service broadcasters have added a large portion of rhetoric that connects the format to classic PSB values. Contextualizing the institutional aims for innovation and audience participation, BBC’s press release included a quote stating that the British public broadcaster is “always looking for new ways of actively involving and engaging the audience” (www.bbc.co.uk, 17.03.06). Test the nation functioned as a test arena for interactivity, and the BBC closely followed the user patterns in order to gain knowledge. Executive for interactive entertainment in the BBC, Sophie Walpole, claims that a key experience from Test the Nation is that people are most interested in interactivity that allows for some kind of ranking and provides individual feedback (www.mediaguardian.co.uk). “Test the nation is one of the most ambitious, live

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5 The Swedish public service broadcaster SVT launched a version of the format called Test Your Vote.
6 Including Japan (TV Asia), USA (Fox), UK (BBC), Australia (NINE), Germany (RTL), Netherlands (BNN) and Belgium (VRT).
7 For the studio audience, it is obligatory to partake in the IQ test consisting of 70 multiple-choice questions, while participation is voluntary for the home audience. The home audience were promised anonymity, but were encouraged to provide their zip code, so that it would be possible for the producers to identify which regions and counties that has the most intelligent inhabitants. The aim of the format is to offer a possibility for the viewers to test their knowledge against the rest of the population (www.bbc.co.uk, 13.12.05).
projects the BBC has undertaken”, the British public broadcaster claim on their web pages (www.bbc.co.uk, 20.03.06).

Technological innovation and audience participation are not values that are exclusively associated with public service broadcasters. Legitimating the format within a context of public service broadcasting thus require references to more core PSB values, such as education. The BBC launched a website that offered the audience learning activities in relation to the format: “In the run up for the programme the Test the Nation-website opens its virtual doors to the mental gym where people can start getting some cerebral training in time for the big day.” (www.bbc.pressoffice\testthenation). Likewise, the Norwegian NRK launched a website where the public was encouraged to partake in order to improve their IQ: “A person’s IQ is not decided once and for all, but changes over time. Education will improve your IQ. The more time you spend using your brains, the smarter you become” (www.nrk.no, 15.06.06).

The format invites the public to partake in a test on general knowledge, and thus value learning and education as important qualities. Exposed for information, the viewers might be encouraged seek additional leaning. Murdock (2005:219) evaluate PSB’s educational project as ambiguous, but undoubtedly elitist: “Audiences where encouraged to climb the great ladder of culture, to move from darkness to enlightenment” (Murdoch 2005:219). As a result of such criticism, public broadcasters have for some time been aware of the need for a renewed educational project. Test the Nation might represent renewal, and a strategy for the PBS channel to approach enlightenment without applying an elitist devaluation of lay knowledge.

In addition to The National IQ Test, the Norwegian NRK also produced This is your vote, from the portfolio of Test the Nation-formats developed by Eyeworks. Also the Swedish SVT launched this format, and it was in both countries broadcasted before upcoming national elections. This is your vote invites the public to test their political preferences through answering a series of question, and offers a personal voting recommendation at the end of the show. Even though the political relevance of this format seems obvious, both the Norwegian and the Swedish PSB institution

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8 The BBCi website can also help users work out their weaknesses with mental agility tests, spatial awareness and verbal skills
underlined the democratic on their websites: “We hope this will motivate people to vote in the election, and especially give young people an urge to turn up at the election” (www.nrk.no), and the Swedish PSB channel SVT admits that the format is entertaining, but underlines that it does “take the election seriously” (www.svt.se). The format is thus legitimated as an implementation of the PSB’s aim to enlighten the audiences, also through entertainment programming.

**Entertainment**

The rhetoric that is used to launch *Test the Nation* in a context of public broadcasting does not disregard the importance of entertainment. The format is introduced to the public as a traditional Saturday night show, with household names as hosts and with celebrities among the studio contestants. Celebrities functions as a counterweight to the focus on knowledge and intelligence, also in the presentations of the format. The BBC’s website frame intelligence in an entertainment discourse by referring to celebrities who are said to have high IQ: “According to some sources Marilyn Monroe had an IQ of 163 making her an intellectual equal to Einstein (160+) and it's quoted that Madonna has a figure of 140, also putting her amongst the top 2% in the population” (www.bbc.co.uk).

The host for the Norwegian version of *Test the Nation* introduced the program as a national television event: “Welcome to a TV-historic moment. This is the largest IQ test ever completed in Norway - Live on television!” The format aims to attract large national audiences, and to provide a unifying common ground for the viewers. ‘Liveness’ is an essential aspect of media events, and is needed to achieve togetherness. As an annual event, the format stands out from the regular schedule. *Test the Nation* thus has resemblance to national events such as Royal weddings or General Elections, but also to media events such as *The European Song Contest*. The song contest is one of the longest running TV programmes in the world, and still gathers large audiences for PSB channels across Europe. Saturday night show

9 In *Test the Nation: The National IQ Test* you’ll find out how smart you are! In this huge live event, a scientifically validated test will find out the truth about your intelligence, and give you a personal IQ score at the end of the program” (www.eyeworks.tv, 20.02.06) The producers has pre-selected the studio audience of about 200 people divided into groups representing various professions or attributes, for example cab drivers, blondes, celebrities, teachers and politicians.
entertainment might thus explain the success of the PSB in a multi-channel environment. The PSB channels transmitted *Test the Nation* on Saturday nights, while the commercial channels transmitted the format on weekdays. This divergent scheduling highlights how the format serves different functions within the context of public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting.

**Participation**

Already in the opening presentation, the home audience is invited to participate in the IQ test. In the Norwegian version of the format, the host introduce the show by referring to the participation feature: “We have 260 anxious, but party-minded participants in the studio, but we also hope that the home viewers will participate”. Moreover, the host provides instructions on how to participate, and reassures the viewers without Internet access that they will not be excluded: “To partake in the test is easy. All you need is a pen and paper, if you do not want to use the Internet”. The host’s further guidance during the show were detailed, and signalised that the threshold should be low and that the whole population should be included: “Try the test! I promise you, everybody will be able to answer some questions, and nobody will be able to answer them all”.

The format *Test the nation* primarily addresses family audiences, and there is a strong emphasis on socializing both in the studio and the TV-sofa. In sum, the game aspect, the live airing and the small talk with the studio audience initiate participation and socializing. The home audience is expected to concentrate on the TV-program, and are also warned against distractions. The Norwegian host encourage viewers to “put away the cake and to stop drinking wine” because alcohol might reduce concentration. The audience is addressed as traditional family audiences. In this TV-environment, it might be a challenge to introduce the Internet as a second platform in order to achieve two-screen interactivity. Before launching *Test the nation*, the Norwegian NRK had done a study, finding that almost 60 % of all households had access to a computer nearby the TV\(^\text{10}\). The pre-studies and pedagogic instructions

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\(^{10}\) Interview with project manager in the NRK Per Selstrøm, 18.05.05.
shed light on how the NRK did not want to lose their core Saturday night segment by being too advanced, and require too many digital and multitasking skills.

**Redefining public service broadcasting**

Through comparing the strategies for participation in British BBC, Norwegian NRK, Swedish SVT and American PSB, this article have illuminated similarities, but also differences between the PSB channels’ approach to the possibilities offered by new technology. A key similarity is that participation is included in the broadcasters self-legitimating rhetoric: the public service broadcasters seems to have found a powerful rhetorical tool in the classic ideals of serving the publics as engaged citizens debate. The claims for media access and participatory democracy made by among others Pateman (1970) and Brecht (1974) is coupled with a future-oriented prospect of serving the public as users in a digital media environment. The positive connotations of active participation contra passive viewing that has influenced central theoretical contributions are used rhetorically in an aim to legitimate public broadcasting.

The analysis of *Test the nation* shed light on how participation can redefine the classic ideals of public service broadcasting: the traditional ideals information, education and entertainment has been renewed in the digital age, and as a result the new ideals of public service broadcasting is participation, education and entertainment. First, the format offers **enlightenment**, and thus achieves a key goal of public broadcasting. Education is often regarded as one of the most neglected tasks for in public service channels. In the digital age, the need to redefine enlightenment in public service broadcasting seems highly relevant. *Test the nation*- formats focus on intelligence and learning, and thus reveal how combinations of TV and digital platforms might provide a solution to the public broadcasters’ challenge of how to handle learning. Second, **participation** is a core element in *Test the nation*, and without audience response, the National IQ test would not be realized. Thus, the multi-platform format redefines the ideal of access and participation in public service broadcasting. Third, the format follows a tradition of public broadcasting by offering inclusive and socializing Saturday night **entertainment**, and thus provides a common ground for the national audience.
The fact that multi-platform formats might serve as a solution for some challenges of PSB in the digital age might have certain implications for the future development of public broadcasting. Interactive services and multi-platform formats will often have a *commercial* side, either directly through paid return channels, or indirectly by involving product sale or advertisement. This income possibility might result in a situation public service broadcasters manage to legitimate partly commercial activity by declaring the need for audience activity. Moreover, participatory formats are often placed within the realm of the *popular*, and thus valued lower than other formats. The finding in this study confirms van Zoonen’s (2004) suggestion that the popular should be valued as a central value in the public service remit. The new technological possibilities to invite the audience to respond to popular programming might cultivate what Scannell (2005) termed the *communicative* relationship between broadcasting and the general public; the digital return channels offers participation that is direct and individual, but simultaneously social and collective.

Entertainment might be the main battlefield for public service broadcasting in the age of digitalisation; public channels have to a large degree kept a dominant position in the viewer market for news and current affairs programming. The main challenge for public broadcasters might rather be to combine popular entertainment with traditional public service values. This article pinpointed a major difference between European and US public broadcasting; the BBC, the SVT and the NRK launched the format *Test the nation* and gained legitimacy as a national provider of enlightenment, entertainment and participation. The PBS lacks this possibility to implement a commercial format in a PSB context. Audience participation serves other purposes in the context of public service broadcasting than within commercial broadcasting.
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